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"The Damage We Can Do":

Masculinity and Rape Culture in M.O. Walsh's *My Sunshine Away*

Holly N. Smith

Binary gender concepts are extremely prevalent in American society today. They revolve around the masculinity and toughness of men and the sexualization and objectification of women. These gender concepts also center around the culture of rape, which condones or excuses violence against women. This violence is one of the ways that men demonstrate their supreme masculinity and power over women. *My Sunshine Away*, by M.O. Walsh, interrogates these binary gender constructs and rape culture in American society. The story is told by an adult narrator reflecting back on his childhood and the negative influences that drove him to be obsessed with his childhood friend, Lindy. After Lindy is raped one summer in their neighborhood, the narrator becomes one of the suspects, along with some other suspicious characters from his community. The narrator's observation of his obsession with Lindy and the guilt that he experiences illustrates the damage that gender roles and rape culture have on a community. As Michael Kimmel writes in his book, *Manhood in America*, "The quest for manhood—the effort to achieve, to demonstrate, to prove our masculinity—has been one of the formative and persistent experience's in men's lives. That we remain unaware of the centrality of gender in our lives only helps to perpetuate gender inequality" (4).